

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

"4-H SOIL CONSERVATION CLUBS"

Broadcast No. 8 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

June 18, 1938 6 - 6:15 p.m.

... - - -

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

MUSIC: Plowing song, fading...

ANNOUNCER

Michigan is a great state--a wealthy state, with diverse sources of income. With the second longest coast line in the United States, its topography includes rugged hills in the upper peninsula, lakes and rivers famed for pike and muskies, shifting sands along Lake Michigan, flat agricultural lands up towards the "thumb." Varied, too, are the state's agricultural products: hay, corn, oats, wheat, beans, sugar beets, potatoes, fruit, livestock, timber...

MUSIC: Flowing song, fading...

SHOUT: Timber!!!

SOUND: Trees crashing to ground, whine of saw going through log, chopping, etc., continuing through following speech...

ANNOUNCER

Michigan was once a rich hunting ground of Indians--Huron, Ottawa, Ojibway, Chippewa, Potawatomi. A generation ago, Michigan was the chief lumber state in the union. But the forests of both hard and soft woods were cut wastefully without regard for the future. Soil erosion, no respecter of states, great or small, is becoming increasingly prevalent in the rich farm and fruit lands which form the state's chief source of rural wealth...

MUSIC: Plowing song, continuing...

ANNOUNCER

Another principal asset is the youth of Michigan, for the rural young men and women are planning ahead in a determined effort to protect their source of livelihood. Michigan 4-H clubs had their inception in the early part of the twentieth century--not as 4-H clubs, but as corn growing clubs. Today, more than 40,000 boys and girls participate in 4-H club projects in Michigan. A year ago one of the first soil conservation clubs was formed in Newaygo county when County Agent Clarence C. Mullet called a meeting in his office in Fremont one April night...

MULLET

Well, boys, let's get down to business. There's only a few of us but I know you all want to do something on this 4-H soil conservation project.

BOYS (voices of agreement)

Yes. We sure do, etc.

MULLET

All right. We'll just talk things over and get some ideas--we have the soil conservation project outlines. Here, I'll give you each one.

SOUND: Rustling of papers...

BOY

What do we do first, Mr. Mullet?

MULLET

Study your outline. You'll find that you start by mapping your farm.

BOY

What's that?

MULLET

You'll understand it better after you've studied the cutline, Elmer. Mapping your farm requires that you study every acre carefully so you'll know what the soil is like, how steep the slopes are, and how much erosion has taken place.

BOY

Do we test the soil on our farms?

MULLET

Sure--you have to find out whether the soil needs lime. Now, let's just run through the outline. We'll talk it over and...

SOUND: Shrieking of fire whistle, clanging of bells, continuing through:

BOY

Fire! There goes the truck--come on, let's go!

SOUND: Boys all talking as they leave room, upsetting chairs, etc. Fire whistle fades out.

MUSIC: Fading...

ANNOUNCER

Yes, Newaygo county's first 4-H soil conservation meeting was broken up by fire--a fire that turned out to be a false alarm. Later County Agent Mullet and his boys returned to their meeting. Alert and eager, they picked up the work rapidly. Aided by E. C. Sackrider of the Soil Conservation Service and James Porter and Paul Barrett of Michigan State College groups were organized in Antrim, Newaygo, Charlevoix, Emmett, Ottawa, and Livingston counties. To encourage the new movement, the Soil Conservation Service held tours over typical farms in Berrien county. One day County Agent Mullet took 12 of his boys...

SOUND: Purr of automobile driving along highway...

SACKRIDER

Boys, I want you to look at this next farm on the right. We won't stop but that's Carl Hauck's farm. He's been growing cherries on those bench terraces for 16 years. I'll go slow. Those terraces you see are sort of stair-step fashion.

SOUND: Motor slows up...

SOUND: Boys agreeing, commenting...

SACKRIDER

You see, this farmer has a steep slope there. He hasn't a big farm, so he needs to cultivate that slope. He's planted his cherry trees on bench terraces, as we call them...

BOY

Just like they grow grapes along the Rhine.

SOUND: Other boys saying, Oh, yes, etc.

SOUND: Motor speeds up...

SACKRIDER

Exactly. And if you noticed, he has a strip of sod between the rows of trees. Sod slows down the run-off of both soil and water. Now, here's the first stop just ahead. This is Fred Carter's farm.

SOUND: Automobile brakes, motor dies, car door opens, boys tumble out chattering, door slams.

SACKRIDER

See--over yonder on the slope--he's growing cantaloupes in strips on the contour. He cultivates around the hill, on the level. That makes little ridges that hold the water so it will soak into the sandy soil instead of running off.

BOY

Why isn't the whole field in cantaloupes, instead of just the strips?

SACKRIDER

That's strip cropping. You see, the meadow between the cantaloupe strips holds the water that runs down from above. The strips are rotated from year to year. On the next farm you'll see a peach orchard planted on the contour with sod strips in the row--but first, let's go up here and get a close look at this strip cropping.

BOY

Come on, gang, let's see this.

SOUND: Boys chattering...

MUSIC: Plowing song, fading...

ANNOUNCER

Soil conservation as a project of 4-H clubs is in its infancy, but it is a sturdy infancy. The youth of today will till the soil of tomorrow, and it is planning carefully the stewardship of that soil. And now, here is Gene Charles, of the Soil Conservation Service, at Dayton, Ohio. Gene, it looks as though these boys and girls are going into partnership with their parents in this important business of saving the soil.

CHARLES

Yes, _____, youth certainly is helping in soil conservation work. I'm thinking not only of the 4-H clubs, but of the CCC camps, where thousands of future farmers are studying soil conservation. Then there's the Campfire Girls--right here in Ohio they've adopted soil conservation as their project for 1938. Boy Scouts are studying it, too.

ANNOUNCER

Many organizations are interested, then.

CHARLES

Indeed they are, _____. But now here's E. C. Sackrider, who had no little part in starting the 4-H soil conservation work in Michigan. Sack, I'm going to let you introduce our honor guest for today.

SACKRIDER

All right, Gene, and thank you. Our honor guest is Elmer Christenson. He's an 18-year-old 4-H club member from Newaygo county. Elmer, suppose you get into the spirit of things and tell us how you came into this 4-H club work.

CHRISTENSON

You mean, the soil erosion part, don't you? I've been in 4-H club work for several years.

SACKRIDER

Sure, I mean your soil conservation work.

CHRISTENSON

Well, after our county agent, Clarence Mullet, called that first meeting I studied the project outline. I knew right then I was going to have a busy summer, because we had to map our farms. I began work on my plane table and alidade right away, and by the end of July I had my equipment ready.

SACKRIDER

And then you took that tour over the Benton Harbor demonstration area.

CHRISTENSON

Yes, and we certainly learned a lot about conserving soil. We saw peach orchards and corn fields planted on the contour. Strip cropping, sheet erosion, and deep gullies.

SACKRIDER

Elmer, what first got you interested in soil erosion?

CHRISTENSON

Mr. Sackrider, I had noticed it on our farm. It seemed that every time it rained a lot of soil washed in our fields--no big gullies but just enough that I could notice them.

SACKRIDER

Do you have any wind erosion?

CHRISTENSON

No, not on our farm, but there is a lot of wind erosion in Michigan. We're troubled by soil washing on our place--especially in the corn fields. After each heavy rain there would be little rills or small gullies washed between the corn rows.

SACKRIDER

And you recognized that as costly erosion?

CHRISTENSON

Well, I don't exactly know. It just didn't seem to be good farm management because I could see that it was the best topsoil that was washing away.

SACKRIDER

And your first job, of course, was to map the farm?

CHRISTENSON

Yes. I didn't know just how to do it but it was a lot of fun drawing the map and indicating the percentage of slope, the extent of erosion, the kind of soil, and so on. Then, our county agent, Mr. Mullet, showed me how to test the soil for acidity. I found some of it needed lime, so naturally we limed the land that we were planting to alfalfa.

SACKRIDER

You say we did? Who besides yourself?

CHRISTENSON

Mr. Sackrider, my father rents the farm that we are living on. We're sort of in partnership and we have some extra help, too.

SACKRIDER

That's fine, and the way it should be. Tell us what changes you made after mapping your farm?

CHRISTENSON

Well, the map showed that we were farming one or two slopes that were too steep for cultivation. So when we plowed for small grain this spring, we left those steep slopes in timothy sod.

SACKRIDER

I see. You decided that cultivation was not the best land use for the hillside?

CHRISTENSON

That's right. We will just leave it in grass permanently. And then we had one gully that was pretty deep, so I built some small dams in it to check the washing.

SACKRIDER

Did that stop some of the gullying?

CHRISTENSON

Yes, I believe it helped.

SACKRIDER

You know, Elmer, you should have a good close-growing crop around that gully so as to reduce the amount of run-off water going into it.

CHRISTENSON

That's what I found out, so we have planted alfalfa above the gully. Another place was beginning to gully, so I planted alfalfa there, too.

SACKRIDER

Good.

CHRISTENSON

And, of course, we limed the land before planting alfalfa this spring because the soil was acid. And we fertilized it, too.

SACKRIDER

What other soil conservation practices do you follow?

CHRISTENSON

We have 16 dairy cows, Mr. Sackrider, mostly Guernseys. We try to get all of the manure back on to the land. I know that helps to reduce erosion.

SACKRIDER

You bet it does, if you can keep up the organic matter of the soil. I imagine your land has been farmed a long time, Elmer--is the organic matter pretty well worked out of the soil?

CHRISTENSON

Yes, I would say so, Mr. Sackrider. I expect it has been farmed upwards of 75 years. The owner used to be known as a "hay king" and an "onion king." But the soil has been pretty badly used up. We want to establish the right kind of crop rotations so as to improve the soil fertility.

SACKRIDER

Your alfalfa will help, if you plow it under as green manure.

CHRISTENSON

Yes, we're doing that. And I'm keeping the farm account books, with the help of the Extension Service, so we know what the farm is doing.

SACKRIDER

That's fine. Now, just what was your 4-H soil conservation project for this year?

CHRISTENSON

Alfalfa seeding. Last year, you see, it was the farm mapping.

SACKRIDER

And next year?

CHRISTENSON

I've hardly thought that far ahead. But I'm also a project leader this year and I have six boys working on soil conservation projects. Next year I'm planning to go over into another part of the county and interest some other boys in erosion control. The land over there is in bad shape.

SACKRIDER

Good for you, Elmer. I think we'll have to admit that you are a first-class soil conservationist, so keep up the good work. By the way, I suppose you would like to own a farm someday?

CHRISTENSON

I surely would. I could do a lot of things I've always wanted to do. Our landlord is a good one but just the same it would be better to own your farm. You could do a lot of things you know ought to be done--like modernizing the dairy barn and...

SACKRIDER

Raising sheep?

CHRISTENSON

Yes.

SACKRIDER

Don't lose sight of those ambitions, Elmer. Stay with them while you're in college, keep improving them and some day you'll be one of Michigan's best farmers. You're practically that now. You don't mind my giving you this advice, do you?

CHRISTENSON

Not at all--and thanks.

CHARLES

And thanks to you, Elmer Christenson, and Mr. E. C. Sackrider, for coming away down here from Michigan to be with us today.

ANNOUNCER

Gene, the things Mr. Christenson has said should arouse the interest of many other young people. What would you offer them today in the way of soil conservation bulletins?

CHARLES

Well, _____, to 4-H club members, I'd suggest that they see their county agent. Many states now have club projects in soil conservation. And some of our bulletins should be especially helpful to 4-H club members. If they live in the corn belt, I'd suggest "Conserving Corn Belt Soil." If they live in the hilly country along the Ohio River and its tributaries, we'll be glad to send them "Strip Cropping for Soil Conservation."

ANNOUNCER

If you would like to receive these bulletins, just write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. They will be sent to you promptly. (Pause) The national soil conservation program aims to help you raise your crops and conserve your land, too. Practical farmers have learned that they can till their soil and keep it productive in spite of whistling winds and beating rains.

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Next week, "Contour Cultivation."

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

This is an educational presentation of the Nation's Station.

###

